FOSTERING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:

A MODEL OF YOUTH VOICE, EMPOWERMENT, AND PARTICIPATION

A Thesis

by

KAREN KIMBERLY MAYNARD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2008

Major Subject: Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Peter A. Witt
Committee Members,	Corliss Outley
	Manda Rosser
Head of Department,	David Scott

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ABSTRACT

Fostering Youth Engagement:

A Model of Youth Voice, Empowerment, and Participation. (May 2008)

Karen Kimberly Maynard, B.S., University of South Alabama

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Peter A. Witt

Youth-adult partnerships are collaborations between adults and youth in the decision-making and planning processes. When adults enable youth to be a part of the decision-making and planning processes, youth voice, empowerment, and participation become important tools for facilitating engagement. Better understanding these processes can be beneficial for practitioners and programmers. Incorporating these tools increases support and opportunity for youth developmental benefits and increases program retention rates.

This thesis focuses on better understanding the relationship between youth voice, empowerment, and participation and critical factors in developing youth engagement and utilizing the power of adult-youth partnerships in youth development. A preliminary model of *Systematic Degree of Engagement* specifying the relationship between youth voice, empowerment, and participation has been developed and discussed.

One of the key issues in developing the model has been that existing literature has rarely made distinctions between voice, empowerment, and participation. The terms have been used interchangeably and, when distinctions have been made, overlaps between the

terms have not been fully explored. Therefore, this thesis built on existing literature by defining distinctions among these constructs. After distinctions between concepts were made a model was derived: *Systematic Degree of Engagement.*

From this research, program designers are able to develop programs and assess existing programs that foster youth engagement. Researchers benefit from this thesis in understanding the distinctions in voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement. The findings of this thesis are the distinctions in terminology of voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement; as well as, a model illustrating these terms independence and inter-relatedness.

DEDICATION

To God: my Father, Redeemer, Savior, Sustainer, and Provider.

The One who created me and sustained me for such a time as this and has provided me with the opportunity of coming to Texas A&M, to earn my master degree and meet my future husband. Thank you for your continuous guidance and protection over my life. In gratitude, this thesis is dedicated to You, the One who receives all glory and honor for my work.

Love your beloved daughter,

Karen Maynard

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thy own understandings, in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path. Proverbs 3:5-6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest appreciation extends to my graduate advisor and mentor, Dr. Peter A. Witt, who has given me the opportunity to pursue a master's degree and instilled in me the confidence needed to finish. Dr. Witt's teachings and encouragement have provided me with the tools essential in entering the youth development field. I would also like to thank my committee members, Drs. Corliss W. Outley and Manda Rosser, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research.

Thanks also go to my friends, colleagues, and the department faculty for making my time at Texas A&M University a great experience. Special thanks go to my panel of youth development experts that were consulted for direction on numerous occasions: Rachel Aaron, Sam Roberson, Ann Gillard, Harrison Pinckney, Matt Duerden, Jamie Baldwin, Chris Harrist and Dr. Clifton Watts. I would also like to include Katy Lane, for all her support and hospitality she gave me throughout my time at Texas A&M. I also want to extend my gratitude to Becky and the United Way Youth Cabinet who were willing to participate in the study and allowed me to be a part of their lives over the past year.

In addition, there is another group of people that I would like to include: these are the many men and women who helped raise me: the youth workers who have been a part of my life, whether they were the daycare worker, the after school worker, the Sunday school teacher, the summer day camp worker, or the advisors I met in college and graduate school. Although many names have been forgotten what they taught me has not. All have played a significant role in my life and my development. They have been an instrument in

allowing me to make it this far in my life, in contrast to the many other individuals who may have experienced my same background.

Thanks to these individuals, I have become passionate about youth development. Looking back at my childhood, many of the children and youth programs that I was involved in did not focus on voice, empowerment and participation but rather just having fun and learning. I can see from this personal evaluation how in my early development I missed out on many of the benefits of programs that incorporate these factors. This thesis is reminder to practitioners of the difference they make in the lives of youth. This difference can be even more positive when they promote youth engagement through incorporating the factors discussed in this thesis--voice, empowerment, and participation--into a program.

I want to thank youth workers for their passion, commitment to youth development, and patience with all. This thesis to me is my gift back to youth workers who desire to make a difference in the lives of youth. The principles discussed in this thesis will forever be a part of the way I work with youth.

Finally, thanks to my sister, Katy S. Maynard; mother, Penelope A. Maynard; and father, George E. Maynard for their encouragement through it all. I did it! And to my future husband, my fiancé, Kyle B. Melton for the tremendous amount of support, patience, and love provided daily.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background to the Study

To set the stage, the researcher would like to describe a p* personal experience in developing this thesis. Writing a thesis can be a long process with many steps. First one must understand the issues within the field of study and make distinctions between issues that are worthy and not worthy of being studied. At the beginning of the thesis process, the research began looking at the concept of youth councils. Not much had been written about youth councils, and even fewer authors discussed adult leadership of youth councils. So the general topic had been found and the literature review was begun.

In beginning the study, the researcher tried to define what a youth council is and understand how they are organized. Four terms (youth voice, youth empowerment, youth participation, and youth engagement) seemed to continuously occur in defining the goals, outcomes, or processes associate with youth councils. Since the literature about the meanings of these terms had been read for classes, the researcher did not at that time see their investigation as a useful topic.

In concluding the literature review on youth councils, the researcher began to look up the definitions of the four terms so that the most up-to-date and agreed upon terms would be used in the thesis. There was only one problem. While these terms had been extensively written about and used in presentations at conferences, seminars, and classes, there did not appear to be a place in the literature that made clear distinctions

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This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*.

between the ideas encompassed by the terms. At first there was confusion. It seemed the words, while interrelated, described different processes.

Thus, the researcher began to focus on better understanding the four terms and how they applied to youth programs. As time went on, more information was found on these concepts than youth councils. And as the literature review continued, the researcher wanted to better understand the interaction of these interrelated concepts. So a model was devised to explain the interrelationship of the four terms, and the fuller understanding of youth councils was left for another time.

The result of the researcher's efforts was a model that linked the four terms together. Over the next months, the model was continuously refined. While not perfect as presented in this paper, it does seem to be evolving to include connections between ideas that influence practice.

The above is the story of how the researcher chased a rabbit hole and eventually caught a rabbit. Consequently you will see almost no mention of youth councils in this thesis. However, more than likely one day the topic will be returned to see if there is another rabbit to be chased.

Positive Youth Development

Terms such as "adolescent" were not used until the late nineteenth century. This was due to the mentality of the day that children were thought of as little adults and treated as such (Cross, 1990). During the late 20th century a movement to protect youths' childhood came to the forefront. Social reformers of the time created contexts and programs designed to remove youth from work and negative situations and provide

the skills necessary to prepare young people for adulthood (Larson et al., 2005). With the "invention" of adolescence, the time frame during which a young person is considered an adolescent has increasingly been prolonged (Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003). There was a time when a youth was considered to transition into adulthood at the age of 18. Today for many adolescents, the period in which young people go to college is increasingly considered a part of this transition from adolescent to adulthood (The Forum of Youth Investment, n.d.).

Even though the transitional age has increased, many young people are entering adulthood with underdeveloped knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to fully function as contributing members of society. Gambone, Connell and Klem (2002) estimate that only 4 out of 10 young people are doing well in their early 20's, with "doing well" defined as healthy in two of the three life areas (productivity, health, and connectedness) and satisfactory in one.

While youth programs started as settings to prepare young people for adulthood, many of them have shifted to become more about daycare, and a way to keep kids off the streets, out of trouble, and "problem free" (i.e., drug free, gang free, abstinent, etc). However, in the last twenty years a movement has begun to change the perspective from keeping youth safe and "problem free" to a broader view of development. Karen Pittman summed up the philosophical change in youth programs with her now landmark phrase, "problem free is not fully prepared," which recognizes that solving youths' problems is only part of the issue. In addition, programs and services should be

designed with the important goal of helping youth develop into fully functioning adults (Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2000).

The field of positive youth development includes many scholars and practitioners who undertake research, develop theories, teach about youth, and design and implement youth programs. Positive youth development programs afford youth the opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to overcome constraints in life and develop into fully contributing citizens of society. Positive youth development programs not only give youth the opportunity to gain needed skills but these programs enable youth to practice these developmental attributes (Pittman & Wright, 1991). These attributes are enhanced when youth are empowered, given opportunities to fully participate in their own development, and express their voice, thus leading to a higher level of engagement (Pittman, 1991). A main principle for those involved in positive youth development is that youth are or should be agents of their own development (Larson & Wood, 2006).

Youth Rights

Recognition of the importance of enabling youth to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors necessary to achieve adulthood resulted in the 1989 United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) which sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. Over 100 nations ratified the CRC, signifying the importance of young people's rights (Hart, 1992). The pivotal Article 12 of the CRC states:

> 1. State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
>
> 2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (Office of the United Nations High Commissioners for Human Rights Convention on the Rights of Children, n.d.)

Thus Article 12 acknowledges that children have the right to express their opinions and to have those opinions heard and acted upon when appropriate. The ratification of CRC has been a catalyst for many international agencies, national governments, and non-governmental organizations to become increasingly interested in empowering and enabling youth to have opportunities to participate, engage, and express their voice.

Article 12 also challenges the traditional attitudes that adults have towards youth (Lansdown, 2001). Article 12 requires that adults listen to what youth have to say and take their ideas and thoughts seriously. Even where youth development practitioners ask for young people's views and opinions, they might not listen to what actually youth are saying. In the end, adults, including parents and practitioners, must learn to work in collaboration with youth to make sure youths' voices are heard (Lansdown, 2001).

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth-adult partnerships is one of the terms used by researchers (Camino, 2000; Jones & Perkins, 2004; Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005) to describe collaborations between youth and adults. Youth-adult partnerships are described as the best practices used by adults to give youth opportunities to engage in the decision-making process for communities and programs (Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005). Researchers have shown a positive relationships between youth-adult partnerships and positive youth development (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Zeldin, 2004).

Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) suggested the existence of an adult-driven continuum of power, authority, and structure. At ends of this continuum two extremes exist: adult structure and no adult structure. Adult structure includes situations where youth have no choice or freedom in the activities they participate in and the way activities are designed and presented. At the other extreme, there is no adult structure and youth are left devising methods of guiding themselves without adult input. Neither of these extremes provides collaboration between youth and adults nor a healthy environment for youth development (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005; Murray & Murphy, 2001). In between the extremes lie youth-adult partnerships, which are further divided by the degree of adult and youth collaboration. These are referred to as adult-driven and youth-driven programs (Figure 1).

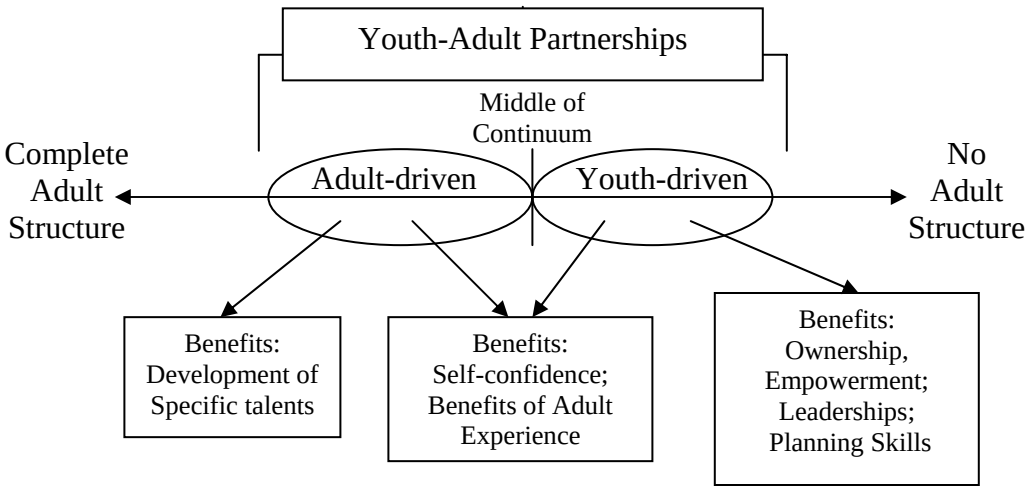

Figure 1. Youth-Adult Partnerships: Continuum of Adult Control
*Model Adapted from the work of Larson, Walker, & Pearce (2005) and Zeldin, Camino, & Mook (2005)

Adult-driven programs are those in which "adults exercise greater control over daily activities but obtain youth input" (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005, p. 58). Youth-driven programs are programs "where youth exercise greater control but adults play supportive roles as mentors and facilitators" (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005, p. 58). A qualitative study by Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) identified the developmental benefits for youth of both adult-driven and youth-driven programs. Adult-driven youth programs aided in the development of specific talents; while, youth-driven youth programs resulted in ownership, empowerment, leadership, and planning skills. Both adult-driven and youth-driven programs increased youths' self-confidence by benefiting them with the knowledge adults acquired through life experiences.

Problem Formulation: The "Black Box" of Youth Programs

However, youth-adult partnership programs are too often a "black box" to researchers. For example, Larson, et. al, (2005) state that:

> …most studies provide little or no assessment of what goes on inside programs: what youth experience, how development occurs, or what effective youth practitioners do to support positive youth development is still much of a mystery to researchers (Eccles & Templeton, 2002; National Research Council and Institute for Medicine, 2002). As a result, we lack *theories of change* that are needed for useful evaluation research, and we have little information that is helpful for the designers and practitioners of youth programs because research findings are not related to variables that they control (p. 541).

In 2004, Mitra began to explore the "black box" in a study of youth voice. Mitra lists Fielding (2001), Goodwillie (1993), Levin (2000) as using the concept of voice "as a construct that described the many ways in which youth might have the opportunity to actively participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers (p. 651). In the same paper Mitra states that student voice is "on the most basic level of youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions (p. 651)," and she goes on to say that "it could also entail young people collaborating with adults to actually address the problems in their school" (p. 651). In Mitra's (2004) study, she focuses on the construct of voice. However, a closer look indicates that the constructs of empowerment and participation are included.

Mitra is not the only author that uses generalized constructs, such as voice, that can be further broken down into a series of related ideas. In much of the literature on youth-adult partnerships constructs such as “student voice,” otherwise known as youth voice, have been devised to understand the inner-workings of youth organizations that actively use youth-adult partnership in programming. Occasionally a distinction is made between voice and other concepts such as empowerment (Caldwell & Ellis, 2006); nevertheless, these distinctions are rarely explored or made obvious in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

While this paper first set out to make distinctions between the factors of voice, empowerment, and participation, it became evident that these factors have a large effect on youth engagement. Therefore, the purpose of this paper became:

(1) To refine the definitions of voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement; and

(2) To understand the impact of voice, empowerment, participation on engagement;

It is important to understand distinctions between voice, empowerment, and participation because programs use different definitions when describing these factors, Meaning organizations choose to use one, two, or all three of these factors at different levels (low to high) when developing a program for youth. In the past, literature has not looked at differences among these factors but rather has used them interchangeably or cumulatively. When these factors are looked at individually, a distinction is made among their effects on youth engagement.

Methods of Research

Information gathered during this study was based on an extensive literature review, and qualitative research including observations, and interviews. Qualitative research focuses on "building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in natural setting (Creswell, 1994, p. 2)." Three methods of research were used in this study: the synthesis of literature, case studies, and participatory observations.

Synthesis of Literature

As noted in the preface, this thesis started out to be a study of youth councils. During the literature review on youth council it became clear that voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement were significant factors in determining the success of youth councils. To better understand these terms, the author identified their meanings as used in other literature and came to the realization that there were differences among the terms. Thus, the author set out to better under the differences. A search was conducted of literature related to youth voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement. Books, articles, and websites were included in the search and, in some instances, articles not dealing with "youth" specific literature were included.

Case Study

The research also employed case studies to investigate the different degrees of engagement. Three case studies were identified to help illustrate differences in degrees of engagement when different opportunities of voice, empowerment, and participation

were available. Case studies were chosen for inclusion based upon two primary criteria. First, the case study had to illustrate some type of youth-adult partnership. Second, case studies had to clearly depict one of the four combinations of voice, empowerment, and participation that were discussed in the thesis. While a number of case studies met these requirements, those selected for inclusion in this thesis were used because of their rich descriptions of the dynamics of voice, empowerment, and participation in a particular youth setting.

Two of the case studies are the works of other scholars that have been published in peer reviewed journals. These case studies are introduced in the third chapter. The first case study was obtained from article *Everybody's Gotta Give: Development of Initiative and Teamwork within a Youth Program* by Larson, Hansen, and Walker (2005). The authors of the article chronicled the experiences of a small group of high school students in FFA who decide to create a camp for elementary students. The second case study was adopted from the article *How Teens Become Engaged in Youth Development Programs: The Process of Motivational Change in a Civic Activism Organization* by Pearce and Larson (2006). The study focused on a youth activist organization, Youth Action. Youth Action is an organization committed to helping urban youth fight social inequalities.

While the author of this thesis did not observe either of the settings described in these case studies, it was determined that the authors of the articles used rich enough descriptions that illustrated the specific levels of voice, empowerment, and participation needed in explaining the model of this thesis. However, the third case study was

completed by the author. In this case study the researcher was a participant observer with the local United Way Youth Cabinet. Additional details regarding this case study are provided during the discussion.

Participatory Observation

The researcher was introduced to the adult advisor of the United Way Youth Cabinet in March of 2007 and given permission to become an active observer of the youth cabinet. The youth development literature indicates that healthy youth-adult relationships lasting less than nine months, in some instances might be more detrimental than beneficial to youth development; consequently the researcher tried not to become overly involved with the youth but created a professional relationship and friendship with the adult-advisor. Although the youth understood the author was a researcher, the youth viewed the researcher more as the adult-advisor's assistant, more than as a researcher or additional adult advisor.

During the researcher's time as a participatory observer, 15 meetings, specials events, or fundraisers were observed. The researcher took part in the activities as needed while observing the interactions, behaviors, and attitudes of the students. The results of these observations were used in later sections of this thesis.

Clarification of Terms

The key terms used in this study have been defined in a variety of ways in the literature. Thus, definitions are offered of key terms used within this study.

- *Authority* is a form of power; trust given to make decisions.

- *Knowledge* is a form of power; the information and skills needed to complete goals.
- *Scaffolding* is the strategic support provided by adults to youth during the course of a project, activity or other form of youth involvement.
- *Youth-adult partnership* is the collaboration between youth and adult in the decision-making and planning process of programs.
- *Factors* refer to youth voice, youth empowerment, and youth participation; along with the combination of these items.
    - *Youth voice* is a process that affords youth the opportunity to communicate and be considered valued stakeholders.
    - *Youth empowerment* is adults relinquishing power to youth; the sharing of power between adults and youth.
    - *Youth participation* is the act of what youth do when they are able to exercise the power given to them.
- *Levels* refer to the degree which factors are present.
- *Youth engagement* is a young person's level of enjoyment in an activity based upon social (individual) and program design (systematic) characteristics.
- *Degree of engagement* are the theoretical combinations that can occur when youth are given an opportunity in voice, empowerment, and participation.

Chapter Division

This chapter has laid the foundation for the thesis by providing the reader with the context for the research, an overview of the study, and an idea of what will be presented in the remaining chapters. Three additional chapters comprise the rest of this paper. Chapter II provides a review and integration of relevant literature. The chapter focuses on understanding youth engagement through constructs of youth voice, empowerment, and participation. Each of these constructs is discussed in detail with the goal of making distinctions between the various terms.

In chapter III, a model is developed to help understand the relationship between voice, empowerment, and participation and their impact on youth engagement. In this chapter, an explanation of each segment of the model is given, along with an illustrative case study. The initial understandings that led to the development of the model are explained in detail within this chapter.

Finally, chapter IV provides a summary of the thesis. A section of this chapter is devoted to recommendations for future research related to further development of the developed model.

Summary of Chapter

The purpose of youth-driven youth-adult partnerships is to incorporate youth voice, youth empowerment, and youth participation. When youth programs incorporate these tenets, they challenge traditional roles of treating youth merely as recipients of youth services by inviting youth to the table to explore new roles as partners in building communities (Carlson, 2004). Based on the literature reviewed for this thesis, there are

many benefits to including opportunities for youth to establish voice, empowerment, participation and engagement through programs, councils and other forms of service provision (Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Rakesh, 2001; Utah State, 2006; Youniss & Hart, 2005; Zeldin, 2004). The next chapter uses available literature to make distinctions among youth voice, empowerment, and participation and the effects of these factors on youth engagement.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Introduction to Youth Engagement

In 1992, Hart developed a ladder of children's participation (Figure 2) which examines the role youth play in youth-adult partnerships based upon adult advisors' leadership. This model was adapted from Arnstein (1969). The model is currently used by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. The steps for the ladder are depicted as levels of youth engagement (Figure 3).

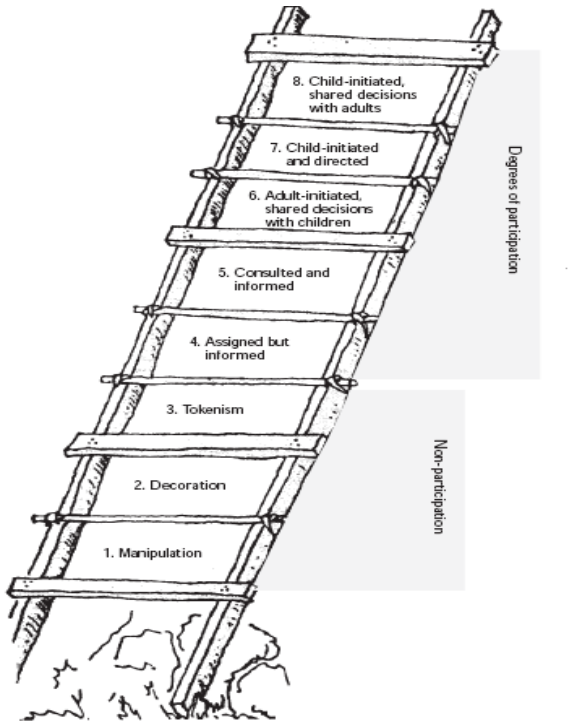

Figure 2. Ladder of Participation.
*Reproduced from Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship (Hart, 1992)

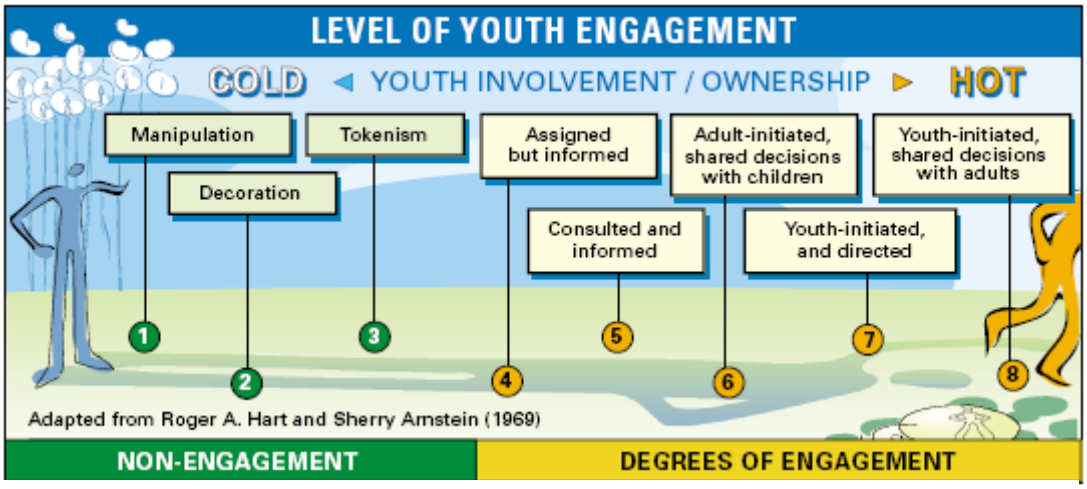

Figure 3. Levels of Engagement.
*Reproduced from Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (n.d.)

The ladder has eight levels (rungs): manipulation; decoration; tokenism; assigned but informed; consulted and informed; adult-initiated, shared decisions with children; youth-initiated and directed; youth-initiated; and shared decisions with adults. These eight levels describe situations that take place within the continuum of youth programs, but an understanding of the systematic tools used in developing these eight levels are lacking from the literature that describes these levels.

In 2002, Pancer, Rose-Krasnor and Loiselle provided a conceptual framework and developmental outcomes related to youth engagement. According to these researchers, youth engagement was viewed as “the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity that has a focus outside himself or herself” (p. 49). A person is deemed fully engaged when impacted behaviorally, affectively, and cognitively. The behavioral component is doing the activity. The affective component is the pleasure derived from the activity. And the cognitive

component is “knowing about the activity” (p .49). These three components are “influenced through the operation of various initiating factors” (p. 49). These factors can be divided into two levels: individual and systems. Individual factors consist of interactions with parent, adult advisors, peers, and intrinsic characteristics (e.g. confidence, self-esteem, etc.). At the individual level, engagement is sustained when youth have positive and supportive social experiences. These characteristics are largely based upon individual characteristics that programmers and practitioners have little control over, especially in the design of a program. For the purpose of this paper, we will be looking at the degree of engagement based upon systematic factors—voice, empowerment, and participation. These are factors that practitioners and program designers have control over in developing programs with strong youth-adult partnerships.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on three systematic factors that impact youth engagement. These factors include: youth voice, youth empowerment, and youth participation. These factors can be used by practitioners and programmers from the beginning of a program to create opportunities for youth engagement. In the current context, *systematic* youth engagement identifies the experiences youth have in a program based upon youth voice, youth empowerment, and youth participation.

Importance of Understanding Engagement

Understanding youth engagement is important to program designers and practitioners for two reasons. First, the main goal of those working in the field of positive youth development is to create opportunities for youth to gain as many

developmental benefits as possible. Karen Pittman's statement "Adolescents who are merely problem-free are not fully prepared for their future (Pittman, 1991)" makes us aware of the importance of not only making sure that youth are problem free but that they are also fully prepared for their life as an adult. Adult-advisors are able to accomplish these objectives by providing young people with opportunities to be exposed to maximal developmental benefits and skills. However, programmers and practitioners can only enable; youth are in control of their development and thus the benefits from these opportunities (Larson & Wood, 2006). Hence, as youth are enabled to be involved in programs with greater levels of voice, empowerment, and participation, youth are more likely to become engaged in the program. Youth who are engaged at the higher level of factors will be exposed to more opportunities to benefit developmentally. Findings from a study by Hansen and Larson (2007) agree that youth benefit developmentally from these types of programs when they are engaged and have a leadership role.

Researchers in the field of psychology and youth development (e.g., Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Rakesh, 2001; Utah State, 2006; Youniss & Hart, 2005; Zeldin, 2004) have made strides in understanding the effect of voice, empowerment, and participation on youth development. These researchers have demonstrated programs that enable youth voice, empowerment, and participation can be powerful positive developmental tools. However, different researchers, use different words for communicating the outcomes of these factors. Figure 2 exhibits terms that

have been used in articulating outcomes associated with voice, empowerment, and participation. It should be noted that the figure does not include a complete list of all terms used and that this list includes elements associated by some researchers with several of these factors: youth voice, empowerment, and participation. One problem with the current literature is that it fails to make appropriate distinctions between these terms and their functions in the overall youth development process. For purposes of this paper, it appears that it is appropriate to talk about the developmental outcomes no matter which element of the model as presented here was referred to.

Table 1. Benefits of Voice, Empowerment. Participation, and Engagement

* Taken from the literature of Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Rakesh, 2001; Utah State, 2006; Youniss & Hart, 2005; Zeldin, 2004

• greater effort • intrinsic interest • more effective learning strategies • increasing protective factors • self-control • self-respect • self-esteem • self-efficacy • self-confidence • reduced delinquency behaviors • programs more effective • communities connectedness • higher attendance • better adult-youth relationships	• morality • organization as resources • increased population health • open-mindedness • personal responsibility • moral development • critical thinking • problem solving • make sound decisions • negotiate procedures of group organization • cognitive competence • civic competence • collective action • commitment to community • interest in voting	• collaborate with others • consider multiple perspectives • understanding of citizenship • develop personal roles in society • sense of responsibility and stewardship to community • democratic habits • tolerance • healthy disagreement • self-expression • cooperation • develop skills • form aspirations • attain valuable resources

This list of terms, while inclusive, should be reduced to a smaller list of concepts indicating the benefits of voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement. The concepts used in the remainder of this paper in discussing these benefits can be summed up by the terms agency, belongingness, and competence (Carver, 1997; Mitra, 2004). The more youth experience these benefits, the more likely they are to thrive in school and other sectors of their lives. Mitra (2004) describes these terms as follows:

- "*Agency* in the youth development context indicates the ability to exert influence, and power in a given situation. It connotes a sense of confidence, a sense of self-worth, and the belief that one can do something, whether contributing to society writ large or to a specific situation (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993)" (Mitra, 2004, p. 662).
- "The concept of *belonging* in a youth development frame consist of developing relationships consisting of supportive, positive interaction with adults and peers and the opportunities to learn from one another (Cotello, Toles, Speilberger, & Wynn, 2000; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Pittman & Wright, 1991)" (Mitra, 2004, p. 669).
- "*Competence* in a youth development context consists of the need for youth to develop a new skills and abilities, to actively solve problems, and be appreciated for ones talents (Goodwillie, 1993; Takanishi, 1993)" (Mitra, 2004, p. 675)

In addition, understanding processes associate with youth engagement is important because as engagement increases so does the retention rate of programs. For programmers and practitioners, retention is always an area of concern for achieving funding and sustainability of programs. Gillard and Witt (in press) propose several

factors effecting program retention rates. Two of these factors mentioned are social and peer factors (i.e. individual youth engagement) and program quality (i.e. systematic youth engagement). Youth are not attracted to programs based on developmental attributes but rather youth are attracted to programs because programs are perceived as enjoyable or because their friends are there. Thus, it is vital that opportunities are appropriate, well-designed, and carefully implemented (Gillard & Witt, in press).

Youth voice, empowerment, and participation can be tools used to create appropriate, well-designed, and carefully implemented opportunities, thus fostering engagement. Understanding how and why these factors contribute to engagement helps programmers and practitioners to understand how to develop programs for youth. Chapter three is devoted to understanding the interaction of voice, empowerment, and participation and their effect on engagement. The rest of the current chapter is dedicated to understanding the distinctions that are often overlooked among voice, empowerment, and participation and how these three factors effect youth engagement.

Four Central Tenets of Youth-Adult Partnerships

The terms youth voice, youth empowerment, youth participation, and youth engagement have only become prominent in the youth development literature since the early 1990's. As noted previously, in 1989 the United Nations ratified the Convention of the Rights of a Child. In 1992, Roger A. Hart of the United Nations Children Fund wrote an essay entitled *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship.* Considerable attention was focused on enabling youth to participate and through time there has been

an increase of youth organizations making efforts to foster youth voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement.

Definitions of the four terms have been varied and often overlapping. For example, some researchers use the term youth voice but include ideas related to a combination of youth voice, empowerment, and participation (Mitra, 2004). However, most of the writings do not explicitly discuss the linkages between these terms and the necessity of making them distinguishable, yet inter-related.

Researchers have described these elements as proximal outcomes of youth development programs. However, it would appear that these elements are both processes and outcomes. They are often viewed as outcomes because they are used as measurements for outcomes associated with programs with expected achievements and they are viewed as processes because they are fluidly intertwined, unpredictable, and changeable over time (Hur, 2006). For the current study, the elements are discussed as intertwined processes, but not sequential. Each is a critical process for youth development but related to the other identified elements.

Youth Voice

Youth voice is a process that affords youth the opportunity to communicate and be considered valuable stakeholders in program development and implementation. Many times adults segregate themselves from youth. This segregation between youth and adults centers upon (1) the negative views of youth that adults have and (2) assumptions adults make about youth capabilities based on both perceived differences in age between the adult and youth, and, ironically, the denial of age differences (Camino & Zeldin,

2002). Segregation often leads to adults thinking they know best and they have the power to act on what they know without taking account of youths' views. While adults often are more experienced and knowledgeable, youth can also be the experts about their schools, their community, and other aspects of their environment. Enabling youth to have voice helps ensure that the perspectives of youth are heard and acknowledged (Gurstein, Lovato, Ross, 2003). A good illustration of the need for voice comes from Jason, a 17 year old member of the Youth Force, who stated:

> If you had a problem in the Black community, and you brought in a group of White people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there'd probably be a public outcry. It would be the same the for women's issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us (Youth Force, n.d.).

In some ways voice is something that is physically heard, but voice can also be something that is listened to by others through the many ways youth communicate to the world. Youth have "active, distinct, and concentrated ways…" that they "represent themselves to society" (Fletcher, 2007, p. 11). Youth voice can be "listened to" by what youth say, how youth dress, and the activities youth choose to participate (or choose not to participate). But in order for youth to have voice, it is necessary to move beyond adult perceptions and have youth perceive that their voice is being heard and validated by others—particularly adults (Ellis, 2001).

Voice as a Right

Voice should not be seen as a privilege but as a right for every child. As noted previously, Article 12 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of a Child stated that children have the right to express their opinions and to have those opinions heard and acted upon when appropriate. Article 13 of the same report acknowledges youth have a right to express their voice:

> The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice (Office of the United Nations High Commissioners for Human Rights Convention on the Rights of Children, n.d.).

Benefits of Youth Voice

Voice is important to youth development because it enables youth to formulate and articulate their ideas to others. These opportunities are instrumental for youth in developing autonomy and identity (Ellis & Caldwell, 2005). For example, Heath (1994) did a study with youth basketball teams that gave youth the opportunity to have voice. Results from the study indicated that youth voice was associated with increasing protective factors, self-control, self-respect, and reduced delinquency behaviors.

In addition, youth voice benefits entire communities as well as youth. When youth do not feel that their voice is being heard or validated, they may feel resentful and not take ownership of decisions or participate in activities as a form of expressing their voice (Newsome & Scarela, 2001). However, youth who do feel that their voice is being

listened to by adults are more likely to engage in an organization (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005) and learn to work with adults rather than rebel against adults and society. In a report on youth participation, Kirby et al. (2003) had the following interview with a focus group of students about what makes a good youth worker:

> Interviewer: 'What are the things that make a bad Youth Worker?'
>
> Young person: 'Someone that thinks they're the boss, and talks so much …but they don't like to listen. They're supposed to listen to our suggestions, but they don't.'
>
> Interviewer: What effect does that have on you then?
>
> Young person: We just boycott them, don't we? We just don't go.

Levels of Youth Voice

There are four level of youth voice—none, low, medium, and high.

- (0): No voice occurs when youth are not given opportunities to indicate what they want and what matters to them;
- (1): A low level of voice occurs where youth are given an opportunity to voice opinions but these opinions are not validated or respected;
- (2): Medium voice occurs when youth are given an opportunity to express their opinions or ideas and their voice is validated by some individuals of power but not others; and
- (3): High youth voice occurs when youth are given an opportunity to express their opinions and views and their ideas are validated and respected by other youth and/or adult leaders, parents or teachers.

It is important to note that the words “validate” and “respect” do not refer to total agreement with the opinions and views of youth. However, what it does mean is that when youth voice is expressed it is seen of equal importance and weight as adult voice. As youth are afforded a greater opportunity to communicate and be considered valuable stakeholders within the program design, planning and implementation processes, youth ownership and interest in the program increases, simultaneously increasing youth engagement.

Youth Empowerment

Some youth-adult partnerships do not go beyond giving youth a chance to voice their opinions, thus giving youth little more than a “sounding box capable of bringing considerable clamor but without the means to make change” (Matthews, 2001, p. 313). Matthews (2003) noted that, “If children know that no one is listening and their views do not count, their interest is thwarted and they enter adulthood with low expectations of meaningful involvement” (p. 175). Once voice is enabled, it is vital that youth also are given power to act on their voice. Thus, youth empowerment is when adults with power actively relinquish or acknowledge youth’s power (Jordan, 2001). Youth empowerment may be defined as the shared power between youth and adults (Page & Czuba, 1999).

Leadership and Power

In order to understand empowerment, there must be recognition of power. Power can be attained through a person’s position or personal attributes (Northouse, 2007). In youth organizations, initially power is given to an adult based upon his/her position as

the “adult leader.” Due to the nature of youth organizations, adults are considered “assigned leaders” based upon their position as “the adult” (Northouse, 2007). Being “the adult” is one seen by youth as an adult's status as leader of the group based upon societal views of adult-youth relationships. With the title of leader, there is an unspoken amount of power that is bestowed to the individual holding the title. This power is the authority given to a leader over a group based on their ability to influence the group (Northouse, 2007) and their personal attributes such as knowledge, skills, and personality.

Empowerment through Authority and Knowledge

Youth empowerment takes place when adults enable youth to become part of the planning process by relinquishing power that is given to them by societal standards and acknowledging the importance and validity of youth power. There are two main ways in which adults empower youth—authority and knowledge. First when adults give youth authority, adults are giving them the power to make decisions or act on behalf of the organization. Adults who give youth authority will enable youth to occupy an administrative position within the organization. When adults enable youth to have authority, it is a sign that they trust and respect youth and youth’s abilities.

The phrase “knowledge is power” can be used in describing the second way adults empower youth. The American Heritage Dictionary (2006) defines empowerment as “to equip or supply with an ability; enable.” Youth are empowered when adults equip them with knowledge and skills. When a young person is taught a skill they no longer are dependent upon others. Since often adults are more likely than youth to have

particular skills, by default they will be the ones with the power. As adults teach young people skills, youth become less dependent on them and the youth are enabled to share power with adults. Thus, Weissberg (1999) has noted that the learning process itself is a strong form of empowerment.

Encarta Dictionary (2007) defines empowerment as "to give somebody a greater sense of confidence or self-esteem." Gibson (1995) agrees with the Encarta's definition and has identified four components that aided the process of empowerment: discovering reality, developing necessary knowledge, fostering competence, and employing confidence to make voices heard. In addition, Larson and Wood (2006) have shown that the more skills children have, the more confident they are in themselves and in accomplishing tasks. Thus, youth benefit from being empowered through gaining skills, competence, and self-confidence.

Levels of Empowerment

There are four levels of youth empowerment--none, low, medium, and high.

- (0): When youth are not empowered at all, adults are making all decisions; youth are not taught skills or facilitated in developing knowledge.
- (1): At the lowest level of empowerment, adults are considered in-charge and make most of the decisions for a youth organization. Youth have little control or say over the activities or mission of an organization and may be given few choices. Youth are taught a few, if any, skills and not strongly encouraged to develop knowledge.

- (2): A medium youth empowerment occurs when adults give youth choices. Youth and adults begin to share control and direction of the program. Adults teach youth some skills and the knowledge necessary for achieving objectives.
- (3): A high level of youth empowerment is when adults fully trust youth. Youth have most of the control and adults act in a supportive manner. Youth are given the ability to direct the achievement of program objectives and are taught skills and knowledge to achieve objectives.

Empowerment that brings meaning into the lives of youth is facilitated through giving youth the opportunity to make meaningful decisions and learn the skills needed to be an invested member of the group (Larson & Wood, 2006). Increasing youth empowerment gives youth a sense of contribution and a sense of ownership in the program. As youth are taught more skills they become more confident in themselves and their abilities. When youth learn and benefit in this way, they become more engaged in the program. Youth given the opportunity to be a part of the decision making process not only became more engaged in their program but also their communities (Zeldin, 2004).

Youth Participation

As youth are empowered by adult leaders, it is important that youth are given the opportunity to exercise their power. Thus, youth participation is an exercise of power (Rakesh, 2001). Youth participation involves adults recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of youth and giving young people the opportunity to make decisions and see results at the individual and systematic levels as a result of those decisions (Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003). Participation is maximized when young

people are able to be central to decisions that influence their lives and take actions on the issues youth care about most (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002).

The above descriptions of youth participation show the interrelatedness of youth voice, youth empowerment and youth participation. Youth participation is the action of what youth do when they are able to exercise power given to them. In some cases the power given to youth is non-existent leading to program attendance, but not true participation. In other cases youth are given a high level of power facilitating both attendance and their taking responsibility for activities (e.g., Youth Summit). At the attendance level youth are passive participants. But as the level of power increases so does the amount of active participation.

Adult Scaffolding

A key tenet of youth achieving active participation in youth-adult partnerships is scaffolding. Scaffolding refers to the strategic support provided by adults to young people during the course of a project, activity or other form of youth involvement (Rogoff, 1998). It is a process of skill acquisition or problem solving (Wood, Brunner, & Ross, 1976) and involves the artful skill of balancing youth ownership with adult expertise.

Scaffolding can be divided into two parts—the learner and the expert. The learner is one who is in the process of accomplishing a goal but may not know how to accomplish the individual tasks that are necessary to achieve the goal. The expert is the one who is able to see the bigger picture and understands how to identify the individual steps necessary to achieve the overall task. The expert controls the elements not

understood by the learner. The expert breaks down the task into steps that the learner is able to complete. In the end, the learner understands that help came from the expert but believes they are the one that completed the tasks necessary to achieve the goal. At some point in the future the learner may be is able to complete the tasks individually without the expert's assistance. This process builds the learner's self-confidence and self-efficacy.

In youth-adult collaborative relationships, sometimes adults are the experts and at other times youth are the experts and adults are the learners. However, in the current discussion, adults are referred to as experts and youth are the learners.

There are multiple ways adults can help youth reach goals while still enabling youth to achieve ownership of the project. Some suggestions for adults given by Larson & Walker (2005) include:

- breaking down goals into individual tasks;
- directing youth's attention to clues and suggestions;
- modeling behaviors or providing words for a context that youth may encounter;
- encouraging youth through motivational support;
- challenging youth to the next level; and
- guiding youth away from frustrating situations.

In the end, scaffolding is a mutual process where both parties must learn to respond appropriately depending on the situation. For adults, scaffolding often entails keeping a

situation challenging without it becoming frustrating; for youth, scaffolding entails taking direction and asking for help as needed.

Benefits of Youth Participation

Youth benefit from being given the opportunity to participate. Checkoway, Finn, and Pothukuchi (1995) found that positive psychosocial outcomes of youth participation include open-mindedness, personal responsibility, civic competence, moral development, and a sense of self-esteem and efficacy. Competence, in general, is a characteristic learned through participation. Competence is not endowed upon a person at a specific age: it develops over time. When youth are denied the chance to participate, it can hurt their development of competence and maturity (Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003, Rakesh, 2001). Through participation, adolescents develop skills, build competencies, form aspirations, gain confidence and attain valuable resources (Rakesh, 2001). Participation enables youth to use critical thinking, problem solving skills, and experiential approach to learning (Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2003). A cycle begins when youth are given the opportunity to participate—youth participation aids development which increases effective participation; more effective participation increases development, and the cycle continues as the young person moves along pathways to becoming a fully functioning adult.

Not only do youth benefit from being able to participate, but society benefits as well. Bass (1997) stated that,

> "a vital, dynamic practice of citizenship is our best hope for creating the kind of world in which we want to live. In the current movement for 'new citizenship' and civic renewal, young people need to be front and center" (p. 203).

Through the skills gained through participation, youth gain their own understanding and develop roles for themselves as a part of a democratic society, promoting a sense of responsibility and stewardship within a community (McCreary Center Society, 1996). Researchers have also reported an increase in population health as a significant result of purposeful youth participation (Kaufman & Flekkoy, 1998; Howe & Covell, 2000).

Levels of Participation

There are four levels of participation—none, low, medium, and high. Youth participation is often measured by type of involvement.

- (0): No attendance means no participation.
- (1): Participation at its lowest level would simply be showing up, i.e., being there.
- (2): The next level of youth participation would fall under the category of attendance and involvement. This form of involvement can be determined as any activity done by choice (i.e. not being forced to participate through coercive means) rather than just sitting around.
- (3): When youth begin taking responsibility for what is going on within the organization, they demonstrate the highest level of engagement. They move beyond participating by choice to undertaking responsibility.

Participation that brings meaning into the lives of youth comes from giving youth the opportunity to be invested and be a part of the active process of learning from experience (Larson & Walker, 2006). As youth are given the opportunity to connect skills with real world experiences, they are able to see the importance of gaining new skills. As their competence increases, it wets their appetite to continue in their use of knowledge and skills, concurrently increasing their engagement in the program.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter has dealt with tools for increasing youth engagement. Programmers and practitioners can increase youth engagement by establishing high levels of voice, empowerment, and participation. These terms are often used synonymously in of the literature. This makes applying much of the literature related to these factors difficult. While these factors are closely related and often used together or interchangeably, this chapter has attempted to clarify the distinctions among these terms. The following is a quick review of the factors:

- *Youth voice* is giving youth the opportunity to communicate and validating what they say.
- *Youth empowerment* is adults relinquishing power to youth.
- *Youth participation* is the act of what youth do when they are able to exercise the power given to them.
- *Youth engagement* is the culminating feeling youth have about being involved with an organization.

In the next chapter, the degrees of youth engagement will be discussed. These degrees of engagement are based upon combinations of levels of youth voice, empowerment, and participation.

CHAPTER III

COMBINATIONS OF FACTORS LEADING TO ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

In the previous chapter the concepts of youth voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement were defined and discussed. These concepts were seen as interrelated but with distinguishing nuances. In this chapter the interrelatedness of youth voice, empowerment, and participation is further elaborated by focusing on how these factors are combined in youth programs.

At times a youth program might only be characterized by one of these factors, but in most cases a youth program will combine at least two or more of the factors creating a new degree of engagement. Each factor has an individual effect on youth engagement. Often these effects are hard to observe as separate entities, and rarely do they occur alone. However, when at least two of these factors are combined, a different degree of engagement occurs. Figure 4 illustrates how each factor—youth voice, empowerment, and participation—are separate but can also overlap with one another in youth programs.

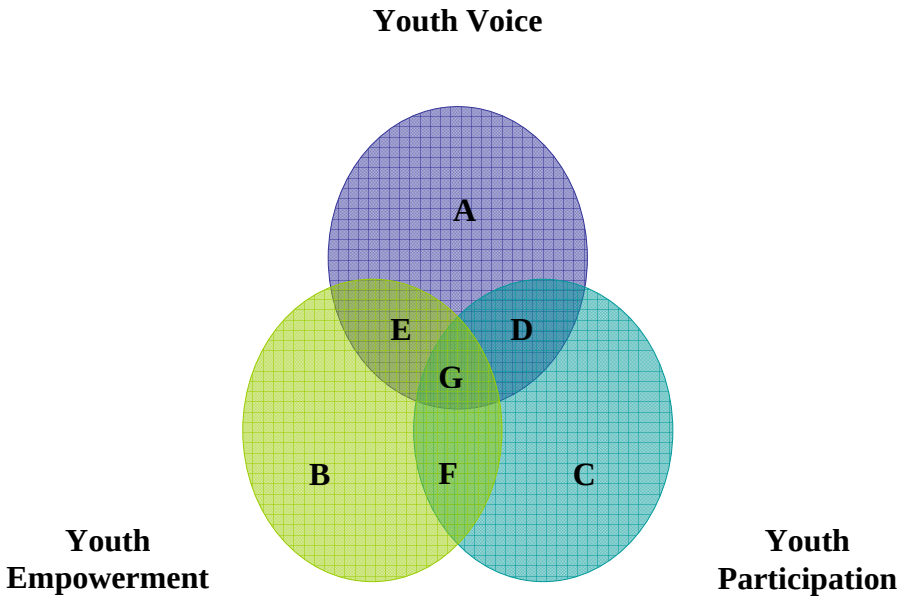

Figure 4. Systematic Degrees of Engagement Based on the Interaction of Voice, Empowerment, and Participation

Each of the separate or combination of factors can have an impact on engagement. Thus, there are eight possible degrees of engagement that can be deduced from the model. The first degree of engagement is the absence of all of the factors. When this occurs, there is no engagement. Three additional factors leading to engagement--the single effects of (A) voice, (B) participation, and (C) empowerment—have already been discussed. The other four degrees of engagement are possible combinations that occur when voice, empowerment, and participation are combined. Each of these four combinations will be discussed in this chapter. The factor combinations include: (D) youth voice and participation, (E) youth voice and

empowerment, (F) youth empowerment and participation, and (G) youth voice, empowerment, and participation.

Initial Understandings

Before beginning a discussion of each of the combinations, the following points need to be made. For combinational degrees, two or more factors are combined in the making of a combination. For example, degree (D) is the combination of factors voice and participation. For each factor discussed (e.g., voice), the assumption is made that the factor is occurring at a (2) medium to (3) high level as discussed in the previous chapter. The third factor, in this case youth empowerment is not included and therefore is considered (0) not-present or (1) low.

Second, other influences can play a role in determining a participant's degree of engagement. These influences include: peers, parents, adult advisors, confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, expectations, attitudes, judgments, among others.

Third, depending on an organization's goals and mission, high levels of voice, participation and empowerment might not be appropriate for the structure of a particular youth organization. Different frameworks may be suited for different situations. The chosen approach should be matched to the characteristics of a youth organization and especially the developmental status of the participants.

Description: Degrees of Engagement

In this section degrees of engagement are described that occur within the interaction of youth voice, empowerment, and participation. In the model shown above

these are labeled as D, E, F, and G. Factor combination D represents the interaction of youth voice and youth participation in youth programs; E the interaction of youth voice and youth empowerment in youth programs; and F the interaction of youth empowerment and youth participation in youth programs. Factor combination G represents the combination of all three factors: voice, empowerment, and participation. Each of these degrees is discussed below, along with an accompanying case study example.

Factor Combination D

Factor combination D in degrees of engagement represents the combination of voice and participation within a youth program. This degree is most likely to occur when an adult advisor listens to what youth say but does not trust or empower the program participants to get tasks done. The leader is the one setting up all the activities, and youth are the ones doing the activities.

Examples of this degree of engagement can be seen in youth organizations that ask youth for input in program development. This may be done through the use of surveys or questioning individuals. With the input collected from youth, adults may design a program around the youth's ideas and suggestions. Youth are then expected to participate in these programs. For example, youth may communicate the desire for a basketball tournament (youth voice), and adults may in response provide youth with a basketball tournament that they participate in (youth participation).

> ***Case Scenario***. *Rachel is the adult leader of a city youth council. She wants the group members to be able to participate in activities that are of*

interest to them. Rachel asks the youth council members what issues they would like to address. Several suggestions are made: helping homeless youth, reducing high school dropouts, building a skate park, among others [youth voice (levels 2/3), youth given opportunity to express opinions]. *Rachel thinks that helping the homeless youth is a terrific idea [youth voice (2/3), adult validates youth ideas]. In light of the youths' suggestion, Rachel sets up a food drive in which the youth are to increase support and awareness of homelessness within the community [empowerment (level 1), adult takes control]. The youth think this is a good idea and work to increase support and awareness [youth participation (level 2), youth are involved].*

This example shows an adult leader who validates what youth express and gets them involved, but does enable them to be a part of the planning process. At times, youth engagement can be high at this level if youth buy-in to the adult's idea. But at other times youth may have low engagement because they have less ownership of the project. Youth may feel that they are being used to get something done. In some cases this can lead to tokenism. Tokenism occurs when adults believe that they are giving youth a voice but have not fully understood the concept of youth voice. As a result, youth are enlisted in projects where they have a voice and then no choice as to how the project should proceed (Hart, 1996).

In other cases it leads to youth becoming disengaged. For example,

Lei is a participant in Rachel's youth council. When helping homeless youth was suggested, Lei thought he would be doing something more substantial like helping these youth get off the street. While Lei thinks Rachel's idea is a good one, he does not have much buy-in into Rachel's idea and does not offer much support because he does not feel like he has had a chance to be a part of the planning process. However, Lei might have bought into the idea Rachel suggested had the decision been made by the youth council. But since Lei just believes he is being bossed around by another adult, he becomes disinterested in being a part of this program.

Having youth become a part of the planning process allows youth to take ownership in a program. Youth have different perspectives and are a valuable resource of creativity, technological skills, social capital, among other resources. When youth are able to use these resources they build confidence in their abilities and develop more skills. As youth are empowered, adults are no longer seen as THE leaders, but rather as a resource to be used by youth when help is needed.

Factor Combination E

Factor combination E in degrees of engagement represents the combinations of opportunities for youth voice and empowerment within youth programs. This is most likely to occur when an adult leader listens to what youth say and shares power with them. At times youth are able to accomplish tasks under these conditions. But at other

times youth do not know how to handle the power, resulting in nothing substantial being accomplished by the youth organization due to lack of scaffolding or direction needed from youth by adults.

A case study from Larson, Hanson and Walker (2005) describes a youth-adult partnership program that used a combination of youth voice and empowerment. The researchers followed the Clarkston FFA over a four month period. During the course of the research, the team observed the activities of the youth on thirteen occasions. Along with the two adult advisors, eleven youth were chosen to be interviewed bi-weekly. The eleven youth consisted of three seniors, one junior, three sophomores, and four freshmen (six females and four males). Seventy-four interviews were conducted with youth and fifteen interviews were conducted with adult advisors.

> ***Case Scenario.*** *The case study specifically focused on a group of youth within this organization that planned a two and half day summer camp for fourth grade children. It had been the idea of the youth [youth voice (levels 2/3), youth opinions expressed and validated] within this organization, three years previously, to incorporate a camp that educated fourth graders about their organization for the purpose that the younger generation would have greater knowledge of FFA and be more willing to join once they attended high school. During the planning period, it was the idea of the adult advisors (who had been advisors with FFA for eight years) to give the youth more control in the planning process youth empowerment. Adults trusted the youth to be responsible and take care of*

> *what needed to be done to accomplish the two and half day camp [youth empowerment (level 2), authority given by adults and some skills provided]. When youth began their project, they were highly enthusiastic and took ownership over the project. The youth came up with individual themes for each day full of ideas for activities, meals, field trips, and learning experiment. Many of these ideas that were given were outlandish and the youth would have been unsuccessful in carrying out these ideas.*

Although youth were given opportunities in voice and empowerment, opportunity to participate was thwarted due to the adult advisors hands off approach. The adults gave the youth a few suggestions but left it up to the youth to make all the plans and decisions. The adults stepped to the side only to be used as a resource when the youth asked for help. Within this study, the adult advisors role in facilitating participation is low. One adult advisor viewed failing as a tool in helping youth learn from their mistakes.

Even though youth are empowered this does not mean that they have all the skills necessary to participate. Participation is maximized for youth when adult advisors use scaffolding techniques. In this scenario, the adult leaders did not use scaffolding techniques in helping youth figure out what needed to be done in order to reach their goal. Youth did not know what to do. They did not have the experience or organizational skills needed to continue. As a result, the project stalled. Some youth stopped showing up to meetings, other youth neglected their responsibilities. All youth became frustrated.

This however is only part one of the FFA story. At times one organization can with the same group use multiple levels of engagement.

> *As the deadline for the camp drew near, the adults switched gears and added a new component of youth participation to the already existing youth voice and youth empowerment.*

The adults this time met the youth at their developmental levels. The adults suggested lessons plans, deadlines, committees, and so forth. All of this was done through the power of suggestions always asking for permission to help, rather than telling youth what to do. The youth had the skills needed to complete the tasks they just needed help in breaking down the larger goal–creating a two day camp–into a smaller manageable task they could accomplish. In the end, the day camp was a success, run by the youth with only a few minor problems. It should be noted that not all the youth who started in this planning process did not volunteer during the camp (the reason for this is unknown).

When youth first get involved in programs with voice and empowerment, youth engagement can be extremely high. This high degree of engagement exists because youth are excited that their ideas were validated and because adults entrusted them to do something. But there are two possible results to this initial high engagement. One, this high engagement can continue throughout the length of the project if youth are able to come together and make good decisions. However, in most cases youth will become frustrated from not understanding the steps needed to ensure large goals are completed.

Youth often need the knowledge and experience of adult advisors in completing goals. As youth become discouraged, their level of engagement quickly drops until they eventually quit (Larson, Jarrett, et al., 2005; Larson, Hanson, & Walker, 2005; Camino, 2000). Adults are needed in the lives of youth in giving wisdom for certain actions and situations. Adult advisors can facilitate participation through "scaffolding" and directing youth's attention, modeling behaviors, providing support, and challenging youth (Larson & Walker, 2005).

Factor Combination F

Factor combination F in degrees of engagement represents the combination of opportunities for youth empowerment and participation in youth programs. This is most likely to occur when an adult leader has an idea and then puts youth in charge of completing the task. In this instance, youth are not the ones who get to express what they want or set the direction of the program. When youth do not set the direction of a program, some youth may not be interested in the direction that has been set affecting their level of engagement in the program.

A case study observed by the author with a United Way Youth Cabinet will help better understand this level of engagement. Over an eight month period of time, the researcher acted as a participant observer observing fifteen meetings and other activities. Twenty-five youth and one adult advisor participated in this youth cabinet. Only two formal interviews were conducted with youth and adults.

> ***Case Scenario.*** *United Way's have youth-adult partnership organizations called youth cabinets. A youth cabinet is a group of youth that acts as a*

miniature version of United Way. The youth cabinet has been in existence since the summer of 2000 beginning with eight students representing two local high schools. Currently, there are 25 students involved in the cabinet representing three area high schools. The current advisor has been involved for the past four years. The youth put on fundraisers during the year. At the end of the year, youth award money to local organizations that help and support people in the community. The council meets once every two weeks during the spring, and once every week during the fall.

During the time the youth cabinet was observed, they raised over $16,000 and gave the money to local organizations that benefit the community. In this observed youth cabinet, youth were given a mission instead of choosing their goal [youth voice (level 0), youth opinions not sought for the goal of the organization]. Youth were able to express their voice and were given choices about the ways which fundraisers were carried out, but the goals and activities of the youth cabinet did not come from the youth [youth voice (level 1), youth given the opportunity to voice opinions on small issues]. Therefore, youth voice is considered low.

However, youth were given the opportunity to be empowered. The adult advisor empowered youth to take charge of making sure big events and fundraisers were completed [youth empowerment (level 3), youth given the authority and skills needed to accomplish goals]. The adult

> *advisor also ensured that youth had the support and skills needed to complete individual projects, as described in youth participation. When the youth did not have the skills necessary, the adult advisor coached them. In the end, youth had the opportunity to lead and develop new skills.*

Conversely, all the youth who were cabinet members were not engaged in this program. Because the foundation of this organization was not created by this group of youth, a considerable amount of buy-in was needed from each youth. Youth who bought-in to the organization's mission were heavily engaged in the program.

Youth that choose to be a part of an organization due to the mission of the group, are in a way expressing their voice through their choice to be a part of the organization. When the choice to be a part of a group is viewed as youth voice, the youth enters into factor combination G of youth engagement—the combination of voice, empowerment, and participation. However, the youth who are a part of this organization because it looks good on their college application, see it as an opportunity to complete service hours, or are forced to by their parent are less engaged in the program because they have not bought-into the mission of the organization.

When these two sub-groups— "buy-in" or "no buy-in"—exist in a youth organization, conflict can emerge among the youth.

> *In the United Way cabinet, the "buy-in" group noticed when the "no buy-in" group was not engaged; the youth called it laziness. The "no buy-in" group would sit around and goof off while the buy-in group worked hard*

> *towards their goals. This frustrated the youth leaders within the organization. The youth leaders asked the adult advisor if in the future they could change the application process to screen out these types of members, but due to administrative circumstance the adult leader was forced in keeping the application process the same.*

In this instance youth voice is a level one, where youth are expressing their voice and adults are not able to validate the youth's voice due to intuitional policies from the organization.

Depending on the makeup of the “no buy-in” group, an organization can succeed or it can fail. If the makeup of the “no buy-in” group consists of the social leaders of the group; this may cause the rest of the group to follow their example and the organization to fail in its mission. However, if the makeup of the “no buy-in” group consists of non-social leaders, the organization would most likely succeed with a few frustrations. In this example of United Way, the makeup of the “no buy-in” group originally consisted of two non-social leaders of the organization. However, two other youth were influenced by the group and although they bought into the mission, they rarely reached their full potential as leaders within the organization.

When youth set the direction of an organization, it is more likely that all youth will buy-in to the mission even when youth are a part of the organization just to fulfill service hour requirements. This can be seen in the next degree of engagement.

Factor Combination G

Factor Combination G in degrees of youth engagement represents the combination of opportunities in youth voice, empowerment, and participation. This is most likely to occur when an adult leader gives youth the opportunity to express their opinions, empowers youth to do something about those ideas, and ensures that youth do something by providing youth with the necessary support.

A case study on the organization Youth Action found in Pearce and Larson (2006) and Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) demonstrates a youth development program that uses the combination of youth voice, empowerment, and participation. The researchers followed the activities of the Youth Action, a youth activist group, for a four month period. During the course of the research, the team observed seven program meetings and events. Along with the one adult advisor, ten youth were chosen to be interviewed every two weeks. The ten youth chosen ranged from 15-19 years old with an average of 16 years old. Half were females; the other half males. Sixty-four interviews were conducted with the study sample. Youth Action is an organization committed to helping urban youth fight social inequalities. The goals of Youth Action are to create social change and aid youth in their development. The view of the adult advisor's is best summed by his quote, "You hear people say youth are our future, and I'm like, no, they are leaders today" (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005, p. 62).

> ***Case Scenario.*** *Most youth who joined Youth Action were fulfilling a forty hour service requirement. The program was based around the issues youth were dealing with at the time they enter the program. The youth were responsible for*

> *researching personal issues that impacted their lives. Youth told the research team repeatedly, "We decide what we're going to work on…these issues are affecting us; it's not affecting them (the adults) directly (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005, p. 62)" [youth voice (level 3), youth set the direction of the organization]. Youth were also responsible for organizing the rallies, youth summits, youth workshops, and meeting with school boards [youth empowerment (level 3), youth were given the skills and knowledge needed to do this; youth participation (level 3) youth were not only involved but responsible for these activities of the organization]. These were all methods used to give these young people an opportunity to express their voice, be empowered, and participate.*

In this case study, youth who joined Youth Action most likely saw it as a burden to meet requirements; therefore, initially youth had a very low degree of engagement. But because the program is run around the issues the youth want to talk about (youth voice) the youth had a high buy-in rate. In addition, opportunities were given to youth in expressing their voice to community members through rallies, summits, workshops, and so forth. The youth were in charge [youth empowerment (level 3), authority and skills given to youth) of making this happen. The youth decided the direction of Youth Action and then partner with the adult advisors in carrying out their ideas (youth participation (level 3), adult advisor used scaffolding techniques).

The adult advisor was just a resource for the youth—he acted as a calendar to remind youth of deadlines; he ensured youth were skilled in the areas needed to run a rally, workshop, and summit; he ensured youth were able to communicate their ideas to

their target audience; but he never told youth what to do or what to say. Although the adult advisors only acted as a resource, the youth were grateful and knew they benefited from the adult support.

> *One youth said, "I probably wouldn't have applied myself or been as dedicated unless I had someone with me, you know, helping me along" (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005, p. 62).*

The Youth Summit was one event youth completed during the four month study. Three hundred youth from their city participated in workshops led and run almost entirely by the youth from Youth Action. Although youth took control of making this event occur, the adult advisor was overloaded in helping youth. Giving youth control does not ease the workload of the adult advisor.

> *It was said that the adult advisor of Youth Action:*
>
> *…provided training workshops for the youth during their summers and guided youth's learning during the school year. He worked alongside them on their campaigns in ways that allowed youth to experience ownership and inject their own style and creativity into the work (Hansen & Larson, 2007, p. 62).*

> *He called members on the phone to get them to the meetings, provides rides, did computer analysis of survey data the youth had collected, and kept a calendar of the groups work. When a student drafted a letter inviting the city's superintendent of schools to the Summit, (the adult*

advisor) provided advice on rewording the letter to maximize its effectiveness (Hansen & Larson, 2007, p. 62).

Being the adult advisor of a youth-adult partnering program is not an easy task. Leaders can easily become frustrated knowing it would be easier for them to do the necessary task, but these adult advisors understand that if they do the work, youth do not gain as much from participating in the experience. The old adage: Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach a man how to fish and he will eat for a lifetime—applies to the work of these adult advisors. Practitioners in these roles are teaching young people how to fish. They are giving young people the opportunity to develop the skills needed to become fully functional, contributing members of society.

The key to having a successful youth-driven program is providing adult support that facilitates youth to stay on track but does not threaten youth ownership of the process (Larson, Walker, Pearce, 2005). Finding that balance between adult help and youth ownership is an art.

Conclusion

In this chapter four different levels of engagement were discussed that are created when youth voice, empowerment, and participation are combined. Each combination was illustrated with a case study that facilitated an understanding of the principles. While it is suggested that the combination of all the factors is best, different levels for youth-adult partnerships may be better suited for different situations. There are situations in which the use of only two of these elements can lead youth to be highly

engaged. Only by assessing the situation will an adult know which level is most appropriate for the group with which they are working.

The boundaries that this model works under have also been discussed within this chapter. Most importantly, these levels are discussed specifically in the context of youth-adult partnerships. This is not to suggest that they can not be generalized to other contexts but currently the research is studying these levels in youth-adult partnership programs.

The following chapter summarizes the thesis. Simplified outlines elucidate the findings of this research. A section in this chapter is dedicated to recommendations for future research designed to further develop and validate the model presented in this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Youth-adult partnerships are collaborations between adults and youth in the program design, planning and implementation processes. When adults enable youth to be a part of these processes, youth voice, empowerment, and participation become important tools for facilitating engagement. Better understanding these processes can be beneficial for practitioners and programmers. Incorporating these tools increases support and opportunities for developmental benefits for youth and can lead to increased program retention rates.

This thesis has focused on better understanding the relationship between youth voice, empowerment, and participation and critical factors in developing youth engagement and utilizing the power of adult-youth partnerships in youth development. A preliminary S*ystematic Degrees of Engagement* model specifying the relationship between youth voice, empowerment, and participation has been developed and discussed. One of the key issues in developing the model has been that existing literature has rarely made distinctions between voice, empowerment, and participation. The terms have been used interchangeably and, when distinctions have been made, overlaps between the terms have not been fully explored. Therefore, this thesis built on existing literature by defining distinctions among these concepts. After distinctions between concepts were made a model was derived. The purpose of this concluding

chapter is used to summarize the thesis and to comment on research that is needed to further develop and test the model.

Development of a Model

Dublin (1976) described four steps in developing a theory. Dublin's steps seem applicable in summarizing this thesis, although the term model is used to label the current product. The following sections describe each of Dublin steps and are followed by how these steps were undertaken in the development of the current model.

Specifying Factors

In the first step, Dublin (1976) indicates that a theory must present a selection of factors whose relationships are of interest. The model presented in this thesis includes four factors: youth voice, youth empowerment, youth participation, and youth engagement. Definitions were created to distinguish between the factors, a step not always taken in the youth development literature:

- Youth voice is giving youth the opportunity to speak and validating what they say.
- Youth empowerment is adults relinquishing power to youth.
- Youth participation is the act of what youth do when they are able to exercise the power given to them.
- Youth engagement is the culminating feeling youth have about being involved with an organization.

Relationship of Factors

Next Dublin (1976) specifies that once the factors have been established, the relationship between them must be specified. For the current model:

- Youth voice, empowerment, participation, and engagement are considered separate factors.
- The factors can be present alone or in combination with the others that are specified.
- Youth voice, empowerment, and participation are considered factors that influence systematic youth engagement.

Assumptions

Having established the relationship between factors, the initial understandings or assumptions associated the theory works should be clarified (Dublin, 1976). For the current model, initial understandings include:

- The model was designed in the context of youth-adult partnerships.
- The model demonstrates that factors (voice, empowerment, and participation) can be separate but also overlapping within youth programs.
- When factors are overlapping this creates combinational degrees of engagement.
- Within combinational degrees, each of the factors (voice, empowerment, and participation) discussed are operative at a (2) medium to (3) high levels,

while factors not discussed in a degree of engagement can operate at a (0) zero to (1) low degree of variance within a factor.

- This model examined systematic factors (i.e. voice, empowerment, and participation) that effect engagement and does not look at other elements, such as peers, parents, intrinsic characteristics, that also impact engagement.
- The model suggests that the highest level of systematic engagement (which occurs when voice, empowerment, and participation are all operative) maximizes youth development. However, medium or high levels of each factor may not be appropriate in every youth development program. Organizations must assess their goals and give maximum opportunity of voice, empowerment, and participation as an organization's goals allow.
- The levels of engagement are dynamic. Opportunities for voice, empowerment, and participation can be enhanced or thwarted during a program.

Operation

Once the factors, the relationships among these factors, and initial understandings are established, Dublin's (1976) final step is to develop a detailed explanation of how the theory operates. For the current model, a detailed explanation is presented in chapter three of this thesis and summarized here.

- Youth voice, empowerment, and participation are separate factors (opportunities) that practitioners and programmers can incorporate into a program.

- Each factor has a separate effect on youth engagement.
- When these factors are combined in programs they produce additional impacts on engagement.
- Each effect is referred to as a systematic degree of engagement.
- Youth voice, empowerment, and participation rarely occur separately within a program.
- Figure 5 is the model. The model shows how the factors can be combined in programs to support youth engagement. Within the model, these overlapping effects are referred to as factor combination D, E, F and G for reference purposes.

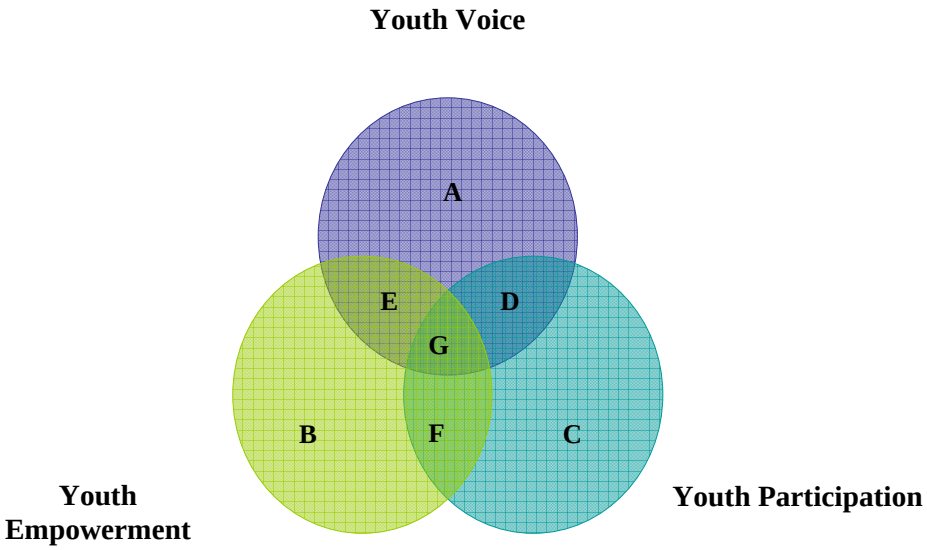

Figure 5. Systematic Degrees of Engagement Model

- Factor Combination D includes youth voice and participation, but does not empower youth by giving them the authority, knowledge, and skills needed to complete goals A consequence of this might be youth who disengage in activities because they do not have complete ownership of the program.
- Factor Combination E includes youth voice and empowerment, but does not facilitate participation through scaffolding. Youth in this scenario, easily become frustrated with not understanding all the steps needed to complete goals. This frustration can lead to total disengagement, meaning youth stop attending program.
- Factor Combination F includes youth empowerment and participation, but does not focus on the issue youth want to deal with (youth voice). Consequently, youth may only do the bare minimum required to participate due to the lack of ownership youth may feel from not having a voice.
- Factor Combination G includes youth voice, empowerment, and participation. In this degree of engagement, it is believed youth engagement will be maximized and fostered. This degree of engagement puts youth in an environment that maximizes developmental benefits and will maintain if not increase program retention rates.

Implications for Practitioners

The developed model has several implications for program designers, practitioners, and researcher. In the beginning chapter, it was noted that youth programs are a “black box” in which little information exist “that is helpful for the designers and

practitioners of youth programs because research findings are not related to variables that they control." This thesis has continued to explore the "black box" and has suggested that there are three variables that practitioners and program designers control that influence youth engagement. The following three implications are presented to assist practitioners in youth voice, empowerment, and participation which lead to full engagement:

- First, efforts should be made to help practitioners become more aware that they control engagement and benefits of youth programs based upon the program designs. Program designers can make a significant impact on youth engagement if the right processes are used, in the current case voice, empowerment, and participation. In this thesis these tools have been examined and a model developed suggesting how voice, empowerment, and participation effect systematic engagement.
- Second, using the developed model, program designers can assess the goals of a program and incorporate a level of voice, empowerment, and participation that fosters the appropriate level of engagement to meet program goals and youths' needs. For example, if Jamie is the program designer for a non-profit youth organization, she is able to infer from this model that voice, empowerment, and participation are factors that do three things: (1) foster engagement, (2) create a ceiling effect on benefits youth receive from the program, and (3) affect retention rates. Therefore, Jamie may view the mission and goals of her program and incorporate the

highest level of these factors meeting both the goals of the program and the needs of the youth.

- Third, this thesis has depicted how these systematic tools foster engagement and affects retention rates; however, there has been little discussion about whether there is a "ceiling effect" on development based on the actions of practitioners due to decisions they make about the design and implementation of the program. In other words, the benefits youth receive from the program are dependent on the level (0, 1, 2, and 3) of the factors (voice, empowerment, and participation) that are available to youth during their participation. For example, assume that voice has benefits X, Y, and Z. If the youth leader only allows a medium level of voice, she lessens the benefits available for youth development, so that now the benefits are X and Y. In essence Jamie has shortened the ceiling effect of developmental benefits by the control she has over the level of voice.

A practical limitation to this model is that youth-adult partnerships require training, support, and sensitivity to the issues of youth development. Training (formal or informal) should be based on understanding the factors (voice, empowerment and participation) and the appropriate applications of these factors within a program based upon the awareness of youth development levels. Other training may focus on the role of adults within youth-adult partnerships. As seen with the adult-advisor of Youth Action, youth-adult partnerships require much of adult advisors. Therefore, it is necessary that

adults have the appropriate resources and time available to dedicate to youth-adult partnerships, so that youth are not undermined and their engagement and development are not thwarted.

Implications for Researchers

For researchers, this model adds to the youth development literature in the following three ways:

- First, this thesis has sought to define and made distinctions in the terminology of youth voice, youth empowerment, youth participation, and youth engagement. Based of these distinctions, researchers should have four distinct constructs to measure in future studies, rather than simply lumping all of these factors together under one label. Being able to make these distinctions will aid in understanding the distinct benefits of each factor as a contributor to youth development.
- Second, now that distinctions have been made in the literature of these factors, researchers should be able to contribute benefits to the specific factors. As well as, discussing the ways in which youth practitioners may be able to apply these factors to programs from the beginning and those that are already in existence.
- And third, while this model was developed studying youth development programs specifically in the context of youth-adult partnerships, the concepts can probably also be applied in other youth development settings and perhaps even outside of youth settings.

Future Research

With any new concept, there are many questions that need to be asked and tested. If validity is not tested, other questions and future research utilizing this model will be more difficult. Further research needs to be undertaken to validate the developed model. This goal can be achieved in several ways.

- First, it is recommended that a panel of experts in the field of youth development evaluate this model. This model has already been evaluated by Texas A&M youth development researchers. However, having other experts of the field review the model and offer suggestions for improvement and modifications should help refine the model and increase its applicability in youth development settings.
- Second, empirical testing should also be used to validate the model. After the development of the model, case studies were used to demonstrate differences in levels of engagement. Only one case study was observed directly by the author, with others taken from available published literature. Because supporting material was handpicked to show existence of the model, it is essential that future research test the model before fully applying in a youth development settings.
- Third, this research supports a regression equation of:

  $$SDE=b_1V + b_2E + b_3P$$

  where V= voice, E= empowerment, P= participation, SDE= systematic degree of engagement, and b= the beta weights designated for each factor.

However, future research should explore the possibilities of interactive effects in the model:

$$SDE = b_1V + b_2E + b_3P + b_4VE + b_5VP + b_6PE + b_7VPE$$

This type of research also adds to the validity of the model while addressing what it means to maximize engagement. Other research questions may test the theory of a hierarchical position among these degrees of engagement.

In conclusion, this thesis has presented a model of engagement demonstrating the potential individual and overlapping effects of voice, empowerment, and participation on engagement. In turn, the model provides a basis for future research.

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